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Message Text

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43
ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01

AID-20 DRC-01 /164 W
---------- 125394
P R 301141Z NOV 73
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8655
INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 18679

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, TH
SUBJ: LABOR UNREST CONTINUES

REF: BANGKOK 18511

1. LARGE-SCALE STRIKES AND LABOR UNREST CONTINUING AS FOURTEEN STRIKES HIS BANGKOK NOVEMBER 29 AT VARIETY OF FIRMS INCLUDING TEXTILE PLANTS, HOTELS, AND ONE LARGE EUROPEAN TRADING COMPANY (DIETHELM). GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISES NOT AFFECTED ALTHOUGH METROPOLITAN ELECTRICAL WORKERS' ASSOCIATION PRESENTED DEMANDS TO MANAGEMENT AND THREATENED STRIKE DEC 6 IF DEMANDS NOT MET. NO VIOLENCE OCCURRED, IN CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS DAY WHEN STRIKE OF ABOUT 1,000 RTG TRANSPORT COMPANY WORKERS ERUPTED INTO SERIOUS FIGHTING AND VANDALISM. TWO GROUPS OF WORKERS, ONE SUPPORTING AND THE OTHER OPPOSING STRIKE ACTION, ENGAGED IN MAJOR BRAWL WHILE POLICE STOOD BY. STRIKE SUPPORTERS THEN PROCEEDED TO WRECK BANGKOK'S NORTHERN BUS TERMINAL, BREAKING WINDOWS, DESTROYING CHARIS AND TICKET BOOTHS, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS. STRIKERS THEN THREATENED TO BURN TERMINAL ALONG WITH 1,500 BUSES THEY HAS SEIZED IF DEMAND NOT MET. BEFORE THREAT CARRIED OUT, FIRM'S MANAGING DIRECTOR AGREED TO 12 OF 17 DEMANDS AND PROMISED TO SUBMIT REMAINING FIVE TO HIS BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR DECISION. ON
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THAT BASIS STRIKERS RETURNED TO WORK.

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2. PRIME MINISTER SANYA, APPEARING ON HIS REGULAR "MEET THE PEOPLE" TV PROGRAM NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 28, MADE EMOTIONAL APPEAL FOR WORKERS TO REFRAIN FROM STRIKES AND SETTLE DIFFERENCES WITH EMPLOYERS THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS. HE DEPLORED VIOLENCE DURING BUS STRIKE AND EARLIER TAXI STRIKE AND WARNED THAT HE WOULD APPLY DRASTIC MEASURES IF HIS PLEA FOR COOPERATION FROM STRIKERS FAILS. SANYA SAID "THE GOVERN-MENT IS LIKE AN ORDINARY DOCTOR TREATING A PATIENT. IF THE AILMENT IS NOT CURED IN TIME A SURGEON WILL HAVE TO SET TO WORK."

3. ALTHOUGH DISRUPTIONS CAUSED BY CURRENT WAVE OF STRIKES HAVE BEEN FEATURED PROMINENTLY IN LOCAL PRESS, LIMITED EDITORIAL REACTION THUS FAR HAS BEEN GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC TO PLIGHT OF THAI WORKERS. HOWEVER, SMALL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NATION PRINTED NOVEMBER 29 WHAT APPARENTLY WAS FIRST LOCAL EDITORIAL STRONGLY CRITICAL OF VIOLENCE IN STRIKE ACTION. IT CALLED FOR AN END TO STRIKES
AS THEY ARE "BRINGING ANARCHY TO THE COUNTRY" AND SERIOUSLY DAMAGING ECONOMY. WRITER CRITIZED STRONGLY RTG HANDLING OF STRIKES AND POINTED OUT THAT THEY ARE AGAINST LAW SAYING, "IF THAILAND IS DESCENDING INTO LAWLESSNESS, WHAT IS POINT OF A GROUP OF PEOPLE DISCUSSING THE FUTURE CONSTITUTION?"

4. COMMENT: APPEARANCE OF VIOLENCE IN TAXI STRIKE (PARA 4 REFTEL) AND TRANSPORT COMPANY STRIKE NOVEMBER 28 IS SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT. IT MIGHT BE EXPLAINED IN FORMER CASE AS DUE TO FACT DRIVERS HAD NO SINGLE PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT AND HAD TO USE "PERSUASIVE TACTICS" ON STREETS TO GET COLLEAGUES TO JOIN IN. ACCORDING TO PRESS, TRANS-PORT COMPANY WORKERS APPARENTLY HAD DIFFICULTY LOCATING AND GETTING MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATIVES TO NEGOTIATE, IN THE MEANTIME ENGAGING IN REARGUARD ACTION WITH RIVAL GROUP OF WORKERS WHO WANTED TO RETURN TO WORK. THUS, RTG MIGHT SUCCESSFULLY CONTAIN VIOLENCE TO SIMILAR ISOLATED CASES (THAT IT WAS NOT AN ELEMENT IN NOVEMBER 29 STRIKE ACTION IS ENCOURAGING SIGN). FACT THAT ELECTRICAL WORKERS' ASSOCIATION IS NOW THREATENING STRIKE MAY INDICATE THAT THESE THAI EQUIVALENTS OF LABOR UNIOS, WHICH HERETOFORE HAVE BEEN QUITE MODERATE AND NOT BEEN IN FOREFRONT OF STRIKERS, NOW FEEL OBLIGED TO ASSERT THEIR CLAIMS TO LEADERSHIP OF THAI WORKERS. SANYA'S "GET TOUGH" THREAT AND POSSIBLE FUTURE PUBLIC ATTITUDE REPRESENT IN NATION EDITORIAL ALSO MIGHT HAVE CHASTISING EFFECT ON OTHER STRIKERS OTHER-
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WAISE INCLINED TOWARD VIOLENCE. IN SUM, THERE IS NO SIGN YET THAT VIOLENCE IS ABOUT TO BECOME COMMON IN FUTURE STRIKES. HOWEVER, IT DOES, LOST OF PUBLIC AND MEDIA SUPPORT FOR WORKERS IS CERTAIN AND FOR RTG ITSELF QUITE LIKELY.
KINTNER

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